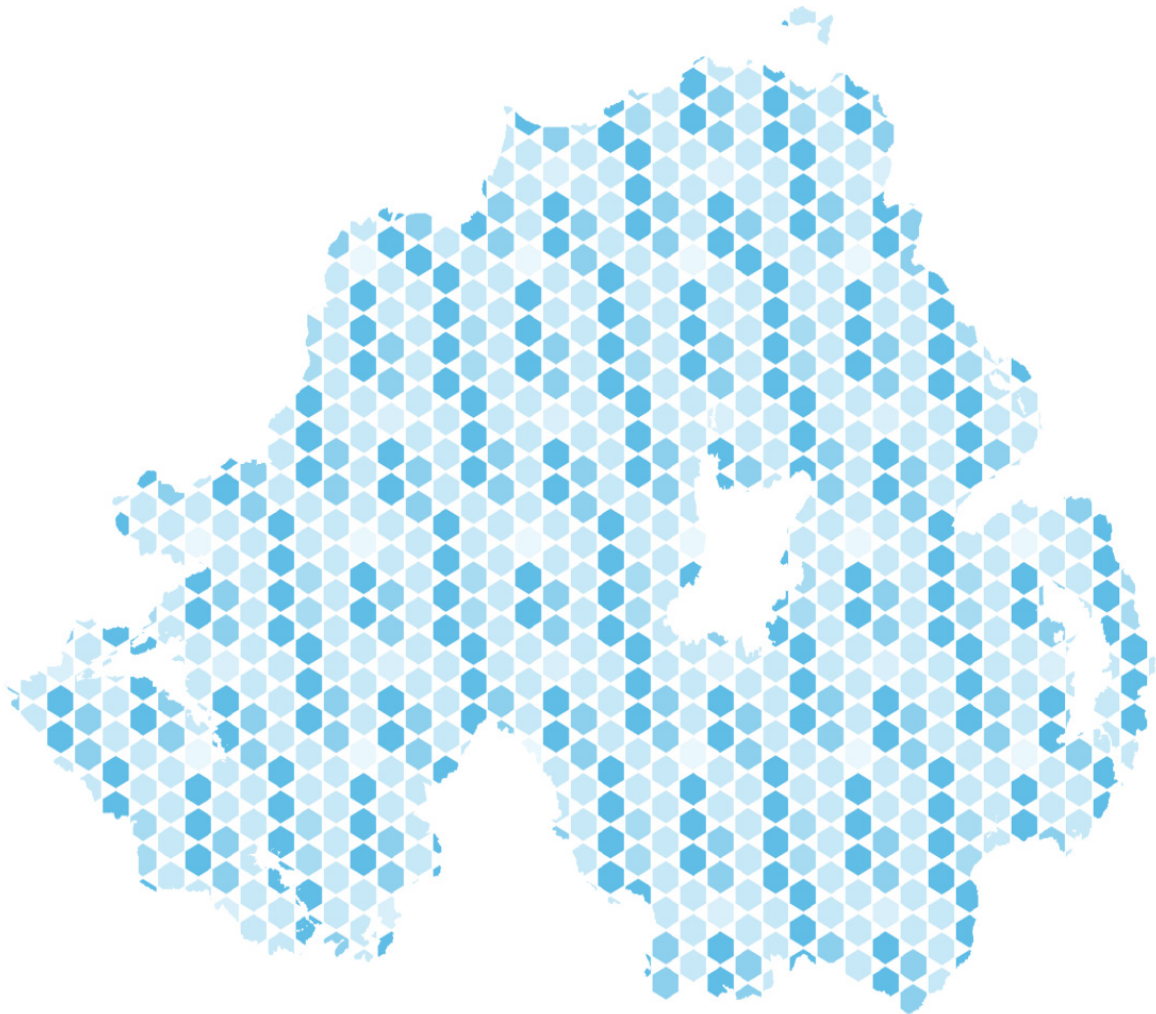


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Holy Family Primary School,
and Nursery Unit, Derry

Report of an Inspection
in November 2010

eti

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	3
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	5
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	6
5.	CONCLUSION	7
6.	THE NURSERY UNIT	9
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION (NURSERY UNIT)	
	APPENDIX	

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Holy Family Primary School is situated on the Aileach Road in the Ballymagroarty area of Derry. The enrolment in the primary school has decreased slightly over the past five years and currently stands at 373 children with an additional 52 in the nursery unit. Almost all of the children who attend the school come from the local and surrounding area. Approximately 59% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 33% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection were evaluated.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6.

Almost 63% of parental questionnaires from the primary school were returned to Inspection Services Branch. Twenty-seven returns included additional written comments. The parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision provided by the school. In particular, they acknowledged the hard-working and approachable staff, the good communications established between the school and the parents, and the opportunities provided for the children to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Fifty percent of the parents from the nursery unit responded to the questionnaires, ten of whom wrote additional comments. The parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the provision in the nursery unit. In particular, many parents indicated that they appreciate the caring, enthusiastic staff, and the range of learning experiences provided for the children.

All of the teachers and 21 members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. These responses were very positive and highly affirmative of the work of the school.

The small number of issues raised through the questionnaires were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The governors expressed strong support for the school. In particular they commented very positively on the child-centred, inclusive ethos, and the excellent links that exist between the school, the parents and the local community.

In discussions, the children in year 6 reported that they feel very safe and secure and are aware of what to do if they have concerns about their safety or well-being. They talked enthusiastically about many aspects of school life including the range of extra-curricular activities and the care provided by the teachers and all other staff.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in both the school and the nursery unit is outstanding. The Vice-principal with responsibility for the foundation stage (FS) and key stage (KS) 1 provides excellent strategic leadership for pastoral provision and care in the school. Working relationships are excellent at all levels and all the staff are highly committed to the care and well being of the children. A strong sense of family and community exists in the school and this is underpinned by a caring, supportive and inclusive ethos. The needs of the children are accorded paramount importance in the school and the holistic, nurturing approach by the staff to the children's development meets their personal, social and emotional needs very well. The children are very welcoming and their behaviour both in and out of class is exemplary. A whole school approach to promoting and rewarding positive behaviour encourages the children to develop their talents as well as raising their confidence and self-esteem. In addition, the extensive range of extra curricular activities and opportunities to participate in inter-school competitions enriches the learning experiences for the children.

The school is strongly committed to supporting the children at risk of marginalisation. This commitment is exemplified by the provision of a Nurture Unit which is staffed, on a voluntary basis, by a former member of the school's teaching staff. The quality of the work in this unit is outstanding; the children benefit significantly from the experience and as a consequence are much more likely to remain within mainstream provision for their education.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school and nursery unit have very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school and nursery unit give outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example through the provision of well-planned nutritious meals at lunchtime and the contribution of the student council to promoting healthy food choices, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The school has recently achieved the Gold Mark in the Health Promoting Schools Award.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The links with the parents are given a high priority within the school and extensive links with the local and international community have been developed. The opportunities provided help to strengthen relationships at all levels and to enhance the children's educational and social experiences. Effective communication with parents is maintained through regular

newsletters, meetings and the very informative and accessible school website. The parents are encouraged at every opportunity to become involved in school events and in supporting their children's learning. In addition the strong links and partnerships forged with the local post-primary schools ensure smooth transitions for the children.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics the school's performance has fluctuated from slightly below to significantly above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. When compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are consistently well above the average.

The children settle quickly to their work; they are highly motivated and demonstrate excellent levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning. Throughout the school there is an emphasis on promoting independent thinking and learning. The children interact confidently with their teachers and with one another, and are encouraged to justify their opinions in whole class and group discussions. They have extensive opportunities to apply their learning in a variety of contexts. The teachers have appropriately high expectations of the children which is evident in the very high standard of the children's work and the outstanding progress they make in their learning.

The school places a high priority on the use of ICT to support learning and teaching; the provision for ICT is outstanding. All classrooms have been equipped with interactive white boards (IWBs) and well-focused staff development has ensured that the teachers are very competent in the use of them. The children also use the IWBs with competence and confidence; for example, during play activities in the early years classes or in year 5 when learning about the equivalence of fractions. The children develop their ICT competence progressively from year 1. The school has participated in the CCEA Accreditation scheme for many years and, when benchmarked against other schools in Northern Ireland (NI), exceeds the NI average for high performance. Recently, the school achieved the BECTA Award for ICT in recognition for its work in using ICT to develop learning and teaching throughout the school.

The children who receive additional support with their learning, and those who attend the Nurture Unit, make very good progress. By the end of year 7, most are achieving standards in literacy and numeracy which are in line with their ability.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of the provision in English and literacy is outstanding.

The children demonstrate excellent talking and listening skills. A variety of well planned opportunities for the children to engage and interact with others promotes very good thinking, talking and listening skills. The teachers encourage the children to give extended responses through paired, group and whole-class discussions. The children are able to talk confidently about their learning, share their views and value the opinions of others. The children are developing a breadth of language to support their learning across the curriculum.

The children achieve very good standards in reading. By the end of KS2 almost all are reading at a level commensurate with, or above, their ability. The school has created a literacy rich environment to support the children's learning, and promotes the enjoyment of books through a number of initiatives which engage the children very well in their reading; as a result the children demonstrate an enthusiasm for reading and are keen to discuss their favourite books, authors and characters. The children learn to read using a planned and progressive programme incorporating a range of reading material and methods to suit all abilities, interests and ages. The teachers make very good use of a variety of strategies, including the development of phonological awareness, which are implemented consistently across the school. As they progress through the school the children read with increasing fluency, expression and understanding of the text.

The standard of written work achieved by the children is excellent and is frequently celebrated in attractive, stimulating displays and through the publication of the children's work. The children have opportunities to develop their writing skills by writing in different forms including poems, instructions, stories, letters and reports. They are also provided with extensive cross-curricular opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. The teachers encourage the children to edit and re-draft their work to improve the quality and presentation of their writing; the children engage in peer evaluation of their work. The involvement of visiting authors and storytellers enriches the children's experience and develops their understanding of themselves as authors.

The literacy co-ordinator provides outstanding and enthusiastic curricular leadership ensuring that there is a holistic approach to the development of literacy through the integration of reading, writing, and talking and listening activities. He monitors and evaluates effectively the quality of the children's learning; this informs the literacy priorities identified in the school development plan. The literacy and language scheme provides very helpful and appropriate guidance for the teaching of English throughout the school. The teachers make very effective use of ICT to enhance and support the experiences of the children.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision in mathematics and numeracy is outstanding.

Across all key stages the children show enjoyment, confidence and growing self-reliance in mathematics. The teachers have realistically high expectations for the children and the well-planned teaching consistently promotes progression in their understanding of mathematical ideas and concepts. The teachers provide opportunities for the children to develop mathematical language and to articulate, clarify and extend their mathematical thinking, regularly linking the learning to meaningful contexts and other areas of the curriculum. The regular and effective evaluation of the children's work enables the teachers to match the work appropriately to the abilities and understanding of the children. The children's work is displayed and celebrated and the standards of numeracy presentation are excellent.

In the FS the teachers are developing appropriate mathematical concepts, skills and language through a variety of games, activities and practical mathematics lessons. In KS1 and KS2, the lessons provide the children with opportunities to consolidate and extend their learning through an appropriate range of teaching activities such as paired and group work, practical work, discussion, investigation and problem-solving. The children respond positively to the range of activities, taking pride and interest in their work and valuing the contribution of others.

The curricular leadership of mathematics by the numeracy co-ordinator is outstanding. She monitors and evaluates the quality of the mathematics provision through the analysis of performance data, sampling of the children's work and class visits. She promotes the dissemination of best practice effectively and innovatively through, for example, the use of video-capture to showcase exemplary lessons. Recent in-service training has helped raise the profile of mental mathematics, the development of the children's mathematical language and the use of games and visual stimuli in the teaching of mathematics throughout the school. There is very effective use of ICT to support the learning and teaching; this includes interactive games and programmable devices, and the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to work with other schools on collaborative learning projects.

During the inspection the children in years 4 and 7 demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of number facts, shape and space, estimation and measures, and showed flexibility in their mathematical thinking. By the end of KS2, almost all of the children achieve excellent standards in mathematics and are working at a level in line with, or above, their ability.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the teacher's medium and short-term planning to support the teaching and learning is outstanding. The plans identify clear lines of progression and detail appropriately the intended learning outcomes and the teaching strategies to be used. The teachers evaluate the plans effectively; the evaluations, combined with the meticulous tracking of individual progress, are used to inform future planning and to ensure effective differentiated provision in all classes.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection the quality of the teaching observed ranged from outstanding to satisfactory; almost all of the teaching was good or better with the majority being very good or outstanding. The teachers understand the learning needs of all of the children; they build effectively on the children's previous learning, and use a suitable range of teaching strategies to engage their interests and ensure high levels of motivation and involvement. The lessons are well paced and the teachers' skilful questioning stimulates thinking and is used effectively to develop extended responses from the children. They discuss the learning intentions and related success criteria with the children and use these very effectively as a focus for consolidation throughout the lessons.

The children who require additional support with their learning are identified appropriately at an early stage through the teachers' observations, diagnostic tests and the analysis of standardised assessment data. In-class and withdrawal support is provided, in both literacy and numeracy. The extensive assessment of the children's learning needs ensures a more reliable tracking of progress and the provision of highly effective intervention programmes by the teachers, classroom assistants and an appropriate range of external agencies. The quality of the teaching and learning observed in the withdrawal sessions ranged from very good to outstanding. The sessions are conducted in a supportive environment and the teachers are well-informed about the specific learning needs of the children. A particular feature of the provision is the extent to which the teachers providing the withdrawal support plan co-operatively with the class teachers ensuring that the work covered in the withdrawal sessions complements and supports the work the children are doing in class.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school has designed and implements very effective processes for the continual assessment of all the children. From the earliest years, the children's ability is gauged and from then on, a carefully programmed series of standardised tests is administered at regular and well-considered intervals to measure the children's progress and their attainments as they progress through the seven years. Where there is evidence from these assessments, supported by the professional judgement of the teachers, that children are either under-achieving or are having difficulty with aspects of their learning, the school is quick to put in place effective intervention strategies which address these concerns. In all of this work, the school makes excellent use of its ICT resources, principally through the School Information and Management System (SIMS) and Assessment Manager to ensure the performance data is analysed for the purpose of informing and improving the quality of teaching and the children's learning.

The children's progress is reported to the parents on a regular basis. The annual written reports are prepared to a high standard by the class teachers and provide the parents with a comprehensive evaluation of their children's progress and attainment and, importantly, highlight key areas for improvement. In this process, the Principal takes a keen supporting interest, and adds personally written comments for each child. On two occasions each year the parents meet with their child's teacher to discuss progress and are able to meet at other times as the need arises.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly. They add supportive comments which acknowledge the effort and contribution the children make. Children are encouraged, through peer assessment, to reflect upon and improve the quality of their work and that of others. Recent developments in the assessment for learning initiatives within the school are evident in the instances where the teachers are indicating to the children how their work could be improved. This excellent practice is evident in most classes and needs to be extended to cover all classes.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management in this school is outstanding. The Principal provides excellent strategic leadership and has an appropriate vision for the ongoing development of the school. He sets very high standards for himself and the whole school community and is highly committed and dedicated to providing the highest possible standards of education for all the children. He sets a positive tone for the working of the school through his excellent working relations and open channels of communication with the children, parents and staff. He has developed an effective team-spirit and collegiality amongst the staff, utilising their expertise and interests effectively, and empowering them by strategically building leadership capacity at all levels throughout the school. The school leadership team (SLT), together with the co-ordinators, provide enthusiastic and effective leadership in developing the pastoral and curricular areas of school life.

The development of ICT throughout the school is led very effectively by the ICT co-ordinator. In this work he is supported ably by a more recently appointed teacher who brings valuable current knowledge and skills while at the same time building capacity in his own right in leading and managing ICT on a whole school basis.

The quality of the leadership within special educational needs (SEN) is outstanding. The vision provided by the Principal and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), and the supporting structures they have in place, ensures that all staff place a high priority on meeting the needs of all of the children who are having difficulty with their learning. The SENCO provides excellent support for the classroom assistants who, in turn, provide valuable, and valued, support for the children in the classroom.

This school takes excellent cognisance of the backgrounds and ability levels of each child and ensures that the achievements and standards of the children remain the key focus for the school. To this end, the school is highly successful in delivering outstanding provision and outcomes for all the children and in overcoming challenge.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Principal and SLT have created a culture of self-evaluation and reflection, involving all members of the school community in the audit of provision leading to the setting of priorities for both the primary school and the nursery unit. An effective school development plan is in place and is clearly focused on raising further the high standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy. A well structured and highly effective staff development programme enhances the skills and knowledge of all staff. There is evidence to indicate that this continued professional development is impacting positively on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school governors make very positive contributions to the life and work of the school; they attend training regularly and ensure that all aspects of school life are kept under review. They are fully committed to engaging with the Principal, the staff, and the wider school community in the best interests of the children. The quality of the cleaning and caretaking in the school is of a very high standard.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the inclusive and supportive ethos of the school which is exemplified through the excellent behaviour of the children, their positive attitudes to their learning and their confidence in talking about their work;
- the excellent standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the outstanding provision for children who require additional support with aspects of their learning;
- the dedication and commitment of all of the staff, and the high quality of the teaching observed which was very good or outstanding in the majority of the lessons;
- the outstanding culture of self-evaluation which ensures that the quality of teaching and children's learning continues to improve; and

- the highly effective leadership at all levels and, in particular, the outstanding leadership of the Principal, who ensures that the achievements and standards of the children remain the key focus for the school.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- there is a caring and purposeful learning atmosphere in the nursery unit. The children respond well to the staff's high expectations and their behaviour is outstanding. They display high levels of curiosity about the range of activities provided in the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The quality of the play is enjoyable and stimulates learning through a holistic pre-school programme. The development of the children's language and communication skills is a key achievement;
- high priority is given to planning for and assessing the children's language and early communication skills. During the inspection, the children demonstrated through their role play, outstanding story recall skills and use of imaginative language. The staff promote effectively the children's development of listening and talking skills. Through the staff interactions, the children are challenged to use appropriate naming skills and to use a range of language to explain and express emotions. In the best practice, the children are given thinking time and are guided to produce good quality oral language as a result of listening to and imitating the language of the adults;
- the nursery unit provision offers a broad and balanced curriculum and outstanding opportunities for learning in a safe and secure environment. The children's early mathematical language is well-developed and there are very good opportunities to learn about the world around them. The SENCO is a member of the teaching staff in the unit and uses her expertise effectively to improve the children's access to the pre-school curriculum. The children with special educational needs are very well supported through the effective early identification, diagnosis of need and referral to outside agencies for additional advice, guidance and support;
- the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the nursery unit is outstanding. The staff treat the children with care and respect and promote good manners at all times. There are supportive working relationships at all levels in the classrooms. The parents are welcomed at the beginning and end of the daily sessions and the staff make effective use of the time to share information about the children's learning. In addition, information is shared at progress meetings throughout the school year and before the children transfer to primary school. Good links are established with the local SureStart and the children enjoy a range of activities offered such as yoga and music;
- the Principal ensures that the nursery unit is a fully integrated part of the school and sets appropriate priorities for improvement and staff development. The school development plan appropriately identifies a key area of improvement in the nursery unit which is the need to improve the children's understanding and use of language through the development of their attention, listening and talking skills. The teacher-in-charge has led the developments in the nursery effectively from the outset, nine years ago, and is supported in her role by the newly appointed assistant teacher. The nursery unit staff maintain effective links with other nursery unit and nursery school staff. They are committed to the

development of the nursery unit provision and take personal responsibility for their professional development through attendance at a range of courses, for example, Musical Pathways and ELKLAN. There is evidence that the training is having a positive impact on the overall quality of the nursery unit's provision. The classroom assistants provide a high level of support and there is a strong team spirit among the hard-working staff; and

- the staff use effective methods of self-evaluation. They have developed appropriate planning and assessment methods to record the children's progress and development. A high quality action plan is being implemented effectively to address the increasing numbers of children entering the nursery unit with delayed language skills.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this nursery unit is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The nursery unit has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON HOLY FAMILY PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT, DERRY

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	1	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	0	2
With English as an additional language	0	0

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	44.23%
Average attendance for the previous year.	92.12%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4½ hours	-	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants	0	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	2	0

Number of: ****	
Students	1
Trainees	0

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	50%
Number of written comments	10

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